

The Pinnacle

Newsletter of Gwent Mountaineering Club

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Fostering
mountaineering
In South East Wales
for over 30 years

North Wales Weekend

Inside this issue:

Welcome to the 30th Newsletter, which opens with an account of a weekend meet in North Wales. The Thursday evening walks are a popular feature of the summer programme and evening descent of Y Grib is described. This is followed by a report of the 2007 AGM. Two members walked across Scotland in The Great Outdoors Challenge. We conclude with an account of trekking in Pakistan's Karakorum.

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The North Wales trip began simply as a *boy's weekend away*, but turned out to be a very successful meet for Gwent Mountaineering Club.

During late winter, I was asked by several work colleagues and some customers to lead them on a boy's weekend in North Wales, a bit of walking, scrambling and of course lots of drinking.

I then began to search for suitable accommodation for about six people, when I stumbled across something called the Vagabond Bunkhouse. Now my experience of bunkhouses is that they are a rather Spartan, basic one room shed or barn-like building with an outside toilet and a cold shower if you're lucky.

The Vagabond Bunkhouse turned this image on its head. It had separate bedrooms with quite comfy bunks, a bar, it offered breakfast and evening meals and also had hot showers and separate men's and women's toilets, the list goes on. It was more like a 38-bedroom guesthouse or good quality hostel.

And it wasn't in the middle of a field of sheep, but in Betws-y-Coed town centre, within easy walking distance of pubs restaurants/coffee shops and most importantly lots of gear shops, a mistake some say, particularly for those who like to shop.

It would make a great venue for the Gwent Mountaineering Club. In my wisdom, I thought that I would give members from the Club the opportunity to come on my boy's weekend and so promptly booked twenty two places at the Vagabond and paid the deposit.

Then I sent a round-robin e-mail inviting club members along for the weekend and I outlined a general walks plan, i.e. Saturday - North Face Tryfan, along the Glyders and Devil's Kitchen; Sunday - Nantlle Ridge. These walks and routes depended on the weather that weekend.

I was a bit apprehensive about paying the money up front and after began to



The Cantilever Stone in Sunshine

think, "what if nobody wants to go on the weekend!!!" but my concerns were completely unfounded and by two o'clock the next day I had twelve names and most importantly the cheques were in the post to me.

By the end of the next week I had filled all the twenty-two places and even had eleven names on standby. I went back to the Vagabond and asked for more places, but alas by this time they were completely full.

But then a funny thing happened to my boy's weekend away, over the next few weeks all but one of the original group dropped out and hence the final group for the weekend were twenty one GMC members and only one of the original group.

"As the weekend drew near and the forecast just got better and better little did we know ..."

As the weekend drew near and the forecast just got better and better, little did we know then that the excellent weather in April was really going to be our summer.

We all set off in our separate little groups and cars on Friday. Some were walking that day and left early, some were not and left late, but we all met up at the Vagabond before heading off to *The Royal Oak* in Betws-y-Coed.

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The Vagabond was quite good but still under repair and unfortunately the women's showers were out of commission, but we quickly worked out an arrangement, which was: "If the door is closed then there are females in the shower", "if the door is open then there are males in the shower." Simple but not foolproof, as we found out.

What if there was no one in the shower ... was the door to be left open or closed?

To find out if it was empty or being used by males, well, there's only one way to find out, the females had to peek inside and this happened on a number of occasions, much to the surprise of the men in the shower at the time, or the delight (or disappointment) of the females.

That Friday night, after a good meal, a few beers, lots of wine, great conversation and good company, it was back to the bunkhouse for some well-earned rest, but not for those who forgot their earplugs. In our room particularly, according to some, well according to most, we had the world's snoring champion and not to name, names, but it was Darren. I remembered my earplugs so I slept really well.

Up early the next morning and what a wonderful morning, warm sunshine and no rain, can this really be North Wales?

We had planned the walks the night before so, after a hearty Vagabond breakfast, one group led by Richard Smith went off to complete the Snowdon Horseshoe including Crib Goch (a first for Lesley Mooney).

My group of twelve went off up Tryfan (via the North ridge), then on to the Glyders and down the Devil's Kitchen, another small group led by Roger Millett went off up Tryfan via the Miner's track and we planned to meet them on top of the Glyders.



Passing The Cannon on Tryfan

We parked in a lay-by at Llyn Ogwen and then we were off, "straight up the ridge", much to the surprise of a few and very soon some grumblings were heard "where is the path, there are no flat bits and do we need a rope", (hopefully not, I replied!).

Passing the famous cannon and stopping only for a few photographs of those brave enough to venture to the end, we continued our way "straight up".

Scrambling our way up the ridge, I pointed out quite a few "Head Banger Rocks" (these are overhanging rocks, conveniently placed at head height, thus walkers who are concentrating on their hand and foot placement simply climb into them head first (ouch!). A hint of dark staining was clearly evident on one or two of these rocks, was it blood or mineral deposits?

Arriving on the top, we wandered through the hordes of people to Adam and Eve, but no jumpers today as it was far too windy and with no time to spare we then descended to Bwlch Tryfan, resting for a short while before ascending up on to the Glyders, where we met the Roger's group somewhat later than planned, about two hours later in fact.



Jumping on The Cantilever Stone

More photos, particularly on the Cantilever Stone (first time ever, I have seen it in the sunshine) and then off towards Castell-y-Gwynt (Castle of the Winds) when disaster struck. One of the group twisted his ankle badly on the rocky ground and it soon became obvious that he could not continue the full circuit.

To allow the group to complete the walk, Roger Millett, Stuart Clark and Jen Price unselfishly volunteered to help Tony Massey down via the easier Miner's track and back to the car.

The group, now four people less, continued the walk along Glyders and down Devil's Kitchen to Cwm Idwal, arriving back at the cars at about



Taking in the View

5:00 p.m. with no sign of the group accompanying Tony.

While three of us waited for Roger, Stuart, Jenny and Tony to return, the rest headed back to the Vagabond. Thankfully, the group with Tony arrived about one hour later, very tired but safe and sound.

Later that evening back at the Vagabond, it was agreed Tony would go to Bangor Hospital just to make sure that there were no broken bones, so he, Ellie Mauser and I left at about eight o'clock.

After a long wait, Tony was quickly checked over and then released, his ankle only badly sprained. We all arrived back at the bunkhouse at eleven forty five.

This was just in time for a quick chat with those still awake and for us to sort out Tony's sleeping arrangements (we made up his bed in the dining room so that he could use the toilet).

Then off to bed at about one thirty, where the sweet sound of Darren snoring was again heard echoing around the Vagabond, bliss!

Sunday is a day of rest for some people, but not for others and, led by Roger, we did a nice little circuit in and around Betws-y-Coed forest and Llyn Elsi, a medium walk starting and finishing at Betws-y-Coed.

"...led by Roger, we did a nice little circuit in and around Betws-y-Coed forest and Llyn Elsi..."

The weather was an overcast and colder than Saturday, although very nice for the time of year.

They say that timing is everything and as we arrived back at the cars, it started to rain. With cars packed and nothing left behind, we all headed back home, but not before a well deserved tea at the Honey Pot Café in Bronllys.

A perfect end to an almost great weekend.

A Summer Evening Descent of Y Grib

Y Grib is one of the classic ridges in the Black Mountains. In this piece, Peter Salenieks describes an atmospheric Thursday evening walk that culminated in a descent of the ridge.

A good crowd gathered outside the *Castle Inn* at Pengeffordd and there was a buzz of anticipation as we set off up the lane towards Y Grib.

The last patches of sunshine gilded the Black Mountains as we skirted below them. A chance for friends to catch up on news before the long awaited ascent began and rendered conversation more broken until we reached the summit cairn on Mynydd Bychan.

Although it was still the middle of August, several of the party remarked that they could feel autumn in the air as we admired the panorama whilst traversing around the plateau to Y Grib.

In *The Welsh Peaks*, Walter Poucher describes the narrow crest and sharp



Curtains of Sunlight as Evening Gathers over the Black Mountains



Descending into the Dusk

undulations of Y Grib, embellished here and there by outcropping rocks. There was an added sense of adventure as we descended into the dusk. The party moved like wraiths until,

one by one, the gleam of head torches lit their path. Once we rejoined the lane, it was only a short walk back to the inn, where we relaxed and reflected upon a fine evening walk.

News from the 2007 AGM

There was a good turnout of around 40 members for the AGM on 18th October. Here's a summary of the main points for those who were unable to attend, or if they were, may have forgotten!

The Treasurer's report was approved. We have £894 in our current account and approximately £1500 in the savings account. A digital projector had been purchased during the year from the current account. The annual subscription was increased by £1 to £18.

The following Committee members were elected unopposed:

- Chair: Dave Simcock
- Vice Chair: Roger Millet (replacing Lesley Mooney who stood down)
- Secretary: Terry Delbridge (replacing Alison Rothwell who stood down)
- Treasurer: Sara Dickinson
- Publicity Officer: Gareth Roberts
- BMC Rep.: Martin Skinner
- Equipment Officer: Keith Anderson

A vote of thanks was passed to the outgoing members.

No nominations were received for Programme Secretary. Dawn Brown, however, indicated her willingness to act in this capacity, so it is likely that the Committee will co-opt her at its next meeting; similarly Steve Warr as Webmaster and Richard Dowle as Assistant Programme Organiser will no doubt continue to be co-opted.

Four motions to change the Constitution were proposed by the Committee and passed. These will have the effect of:

1. Confirming the Club's affiliation to the BMC.
2. Removing the need for new members to be proposed and seconded by existing members (making it easier to join).
3. Removing the Committee post of Publicity Officer and creating two new posts of Membership Secretary

and Website Officer (re-assigning and clarifying roles and recognising their importance).

4. Increasing the Committee quorum to five (to take account of the newly created posts).

Motions 3 & 4 will take effect at the next AGM.

The Chairman encouraged Club members to debate during the coming year the possibility of using part or all of the £1500 in the Savings account (which was originally raised many years ago to build a climbing wall) for a worthwhile project that would be of long-lasting benefit the Club.

Several votes of thanks were passed to members who have organised and helped with the Club's activities throughout the year, which was generally felt to have been a good one for the Club.

Any queries about any of the above, please contact a Committee member.

TGO Challenge 2007

Sally and John Dodwell completed The Great Outdoors Challenge earlier this year. It is one of the most sociable walks of its kind, with many informal gatherings on the way across Scotland...

The TGO challenge is a unique event that takes place for two weeks in May each year. It is not competitive and participants make their way across Scotland on foot from the West coast to the East coast. There are specified 'signing out' points on the West Coast and the finish point can be anywhere between Stonehaven and Arbroath on the East Coast. One can choose a high level route taking in plenty of hills or a low level route through the glens or a mixture of the two. Overnight accommodation can vary from wild camping to hotels, bothies to bunk houses.

It is a sociable walk with many informal gatherings along the way and the locals supply excellent hospitality in many places. Braemar is not to be missed; Tarfside is a treat where a hostel is opened up especially for challengers with bacon sarnies to dream of and a private house hosting a bar for the week. Camping on the village green is expected.

Having completed our first crossing in 2006 from Lochailort (west of Fort William) to Montrose we then applied and were accepted for the 2007 event. This time we started at Shiel Bridge. By flying to Inverness (courtesy of Easy Jet from Bristol) and thence by a sickening bus ride we reached Shiel Bridge by 4.00 p.m. to enjoy a night of luxury in the hotel.

It took us 13 days to walk to the East Coast. Highlights of the route were many. Our first day took us vertically up and over the Bealach Duibh to a wild camp at Allbeithe. A boggy site but ringed by mountains and views down to distant Loch Quoich. Thence through East Glen Quoich to the Tomdoun Hotel, a traditional Scottish sporting lodge. Here an unavoidable road plod was interrupted by a man with a camper van offering tea and biscuits along the way. He later turned up at Tomdoun and revealed himself to be Hamish Brown, the well known munroist and author. An entertaining evening followed and the expensive and somewhat lacking in bulk dinner was hastily forgotten.

East through forest to Invergarry -



Wild Camp at Allbeithe

an excellent privately owned hostel, the recommended café was shut!

Over the Great Glen at Aberchalder and a wild tussocky struggle up Glen Buck (never again) to the Corrieyairach Pass, originally constructed by General Wade. Snow and a bitter wind made the eroded descent a vile experience, but Melgarve bothy was a haven. Being too windy to put the tent up we slept on the floor with others. Awakening to a frosty morning with hills sprinkled with snow was lovely. On to a bunkhouse at Lagan which was not good. My altimeter went crazy and would not stop bleeping so I hid it in a flower pot and others visitors got worried about a bomb!

Newtonmore, Kinghussie and into Glen Feshie. It is beautiful and the busy Ruigh-aiteachain bothy has a loo. At night the barometer plummeted and bad weather threatened. Through Glen Feshie to Braemar is over 36 km. The wind buffeted us, rain drizzled and hard going made for a wild camp on boggy ground just before the Linn of Dee.

Into Braemar was long plod interrupted by Invergarry YHA opening up for coffee and biscuits.

Braemar offered a wonderful B&B, the Fife Arms, full of challengers and a useful outdoor shop to top up the gas and goodies. We had decided to walk through the Balmoral estate. Special

permission from HRH let us in through an otherwise forbidden way and the café was excellent. A very boring road led to Ballater but the climb over Mount Keen (700m) the following day was brilliant. Clearing weather made for wonderful views and an upgraded path helped the legs cope with a long descent. We were heading for Tarfside

"...the late evening sunshine made the final miles easier."

and the late evening sunshine made the final miles easier. Here was a wonderful reception at St Dunstons Hostel - wine, a hot meal and good company. Little tents covering the village green and two days to go.

Edzell was the next destination. For most an amble down the valley. But for us ... up and over the Wirren Hills looked more exciting. A bad mistake. Bog, tussocks and an out of date map made the day very hard, but an excellent B&B fortified the tired spirits.

Finally, the road walk to Montrose, the beach for toe dipping and a great welcome at the Park Hotel.

An excellent celebration dinner held on Thursday evening completed the event. Farewells to familiar faces and for some a promise to return yet again to the TGO. Beware it is addictive.

Trekking in Pakistan's Karakoram

The sights and sounds of distant lands weave a magic of their own that Kay Beechey captures in her story about trekking in the Karakoram.

4 a.m. I lay still, straining to hear anything in the intense quiet of the darkened room. Something had woken me, but there had been so much talk, so many rumours, that I could have been dreaming. I started to relax, started to let sleep envelope me once more, but then I heard it again. Dull and deep, the explosion sounded distant yet incredibly defined. I stiffened again and lay tensely listening as another explosion rumbled like a short clap of distant thunder. They must be storming the Red Mosque again. The Red Mosque with its madrassa full of women and children. Of course we were perfectly safe here at the hotel; the mosque was in another district of Islamabad far enough away for us to be totally unaffected – like living in Roath while they blew up the Millennium Stadium. That reassurance of our safety was all that had concerned me as the news of the stand-off surfaced when we finished trekking. But now, as the explosions broke the silence of the early morning, my self-absorption was blasted away and left me frightened for the women and children trapped within the Mosque's religious school and for the soldiers risking their lives to end the siege. I was suddenly and acutely aware that the consequences of this event, making major headlines throughout the world, could be disastrous for the people of Pakistan and the country itself.

Part of me had fallen in love with Pakistan during my three and a half weeks there. It is the sort of country that completely bombards you with sensory overload. You cannot remain impassive when faced with all that is so different from our everyday existence in Britain. It was my first trip to a third world country and, after the initial shock of arriving at Islamabad airport amidst a mass of scurrying pastel blue and beige cotton clad men, I lapped up the sights, sounds and smells with a wonder I hadn't felt since childhood.

Our adventure began in modern, characterless Islamabad, our taxi weaving precariously across the lanes of the wide city highway, jostling for position and forcing its way to whatever part of the road it wanted to be regardless of

what else was already there or fast approaching. The sound of horns blasting and the searing heat might have been oppressive after our night-long flight if it hadn't been so new and exciting.

We were also taken to Rawalpindi that day, Islamabad's older neighbour. Here we took our lives in our hands, joining freely roaming animals and men pushing laden handcarts, to wander amidst the horn-blasting, jostling traffic. Tourists are still objects of curiosity here, so uncomfortable with all the stares, I exchanged my baggy trekking trousers and long-sleeved shirt for a shalwar kameez, an embroidered long tunic with baggy trousers and matching headscarf bought from a Rawalpindi stall for about £5. Although my fair skin and blue eyes still revealed my western origins, I felt much more comfortable weathering the stares dressed like a Pakistani woman.

From Islamabad, we were taken on a two day bus journey to Skardu, beginning on the Karakoram Highway, one of the great roads of the world. 1300 km long, it took twenty years to complete and was finally opened in 1986. Many workers lost their lives during construction mainly due to landslides, and landslides remain a problem to this day, closing the road and completely cutting off villages along the route.

You have to have a head for heights

to travel on the roads of Northern Pakistan. High above the Indus River, the Karakoram Highway clings to the cliff face yet drivers show the same scant respect for other road-users as they do on the highways of Islamabad. Horns blaring, they rush past each other, regardless of the precipitous drops or the narrowness of the road. But the views ...the views of the cliffs, mountains and the tumbling grey river way below are breath-taking. We also drove through villages with hundreds of men swarming in their light cotton shalwar-kameez, yet no sign of any women. The few we saw were outside the villages, covered from head to foot in colourful cotton, shyly covering their faces with their scarves as we passed.

We were luckier in Skardu, the capital of Baltistan. As three of us headed out of the village to explore the hillside Karpoche Fort, we were stopped by an attractive Pakistani woman surrounded by her young family and anxious to practise her English. We were well aware that had any of the men of our party been with us, we wouldn't have had the privilege of talking with her. She introduced us to her family who, young as they were, spoke to us in basic but impeccable English.

From dusty, bustling Skardu we set out on an eight-hour jeep ride to Askole, where the K2 Base Camp trek



Truck on the Karakoram Highway

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starts. Bundled into ancient Toyota Land Cruisers, we bounced and jolted in a cloud of dust along the relatively smooth high street of Skardu. When we left town and headed through tiny mud hut villages and apricot groves on a single track stony lane, we were thrown around inside like beads in a baby's rattle. A fairground ride that lasted eight hours through some of the best mountain scenery we'd seen so far. Not so much fun for some of the party though; many were suffering from a bout of sickness and diarrhoea, which was to prove the scourge of our visit to Pakistan, and each bump brought on a new wave of nausea. I was luckier. Slight queasiness having disappeared on our rest day in Skardu, I grinned and laughed my way over every bump, jolt and boulder and around every hairpin bend all the way to Askole.

After our first night under canvas at Askole's busy but basic campsite we rose early, ready for our first day of the trek. The travelling and village experiences had been great, but we were all impatient to get walking. We breakfasted on freshly made chapattis and cornflakes made soggy by warm milk served by a quietly attentive Balti waiter, then watched as our bags were weighed ready for the porters. This was all entirely new for me; I had always carried my own bags and cooked my own camp food. Throughout the trek, we were treated like Lords and Ladies of the Manor in Eighteenth Century England. Of course, compared to the porters, who earned around £3 for each stage of the trek, we were enormously wealthy and highly privileged, yet we rarely encountered any animosity or even envy amongst the Balti trek crew. The porters, tiny, dark-skinned men dressed simply in the traditional shalwar kameez and canvas shoes, would carry up to 25 kg of our luggage plus whatever food and shelter they would need. While we were tucked up in down sleeping bags inside our expedition style tents, they would huddle together in caves or in roughly built stone shelters topped by a tarpaulin they carried with them. Yet they seemed happy, proud of their strength and boastful about the distances they could cover. As you neared a campsite at the end of the day's walking, you would invariably be met by a heavily-laden porter coming the other way. "Hellooo," they'd grin at



Porters at Urkudas

you, "Welcome to Paiju". Of course, some weren't so friendly, or as efficient in getting your bags to you at the end of the day. Neither of my bags turned up on day four of the trek so I had to borrow a sleeping bag and manage with what I'd carried myself. It had been a blisteringly hot day and one of the longer sections of the trek, so my porter had obviously decided that enough was enough and had camped out on the glacier overnight. My bags turned up the next morning, but Pete, our group's only American, didn't see his until two days later.



Dave Bingham on the Trek to Jhola

The first five days of the trek were scorchingly hot. With little shade, most people walked with umbrellas, remarkably effective at keeping the direct sun off your head. The scenery got increasingly spectacular as we got further up the valley and by the end of the second day we were surrounded by

wonderful mountain scenery. As we progressed towards and eventually onto the Baltoro glacier, the route became more arduous, while the mountains became more and more awe-inspiring. Peak upon peak towered above the rubble-covered, grey glacier, shining in the heat of the day. The stark granite towers of Trango, snow-dusted Masherbrum with its distinctive tooth-pick top, the rubble-covered, grey glacier occasionally glistening rich turquoise in the intense sun: it was nature at its most magnificent.

Once we were on the glacier, the walking was unremittingly demanding. Constantly climbing and descending on indistinct paths, boulder hopping on ground reminiscent of the Glyders, jumping across small crevasses and above all, struggling for breath as our bodies fought to adapt to the high altitude. Many of us were weak with persistent diarrhoea; I had



Baltoro Cathedral from Urkudas at 4050 m

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escaped so far but had had laryngitis and a tight chest. Everyone was struggling with the heat. Day four, our first on the glacier and on its lateral moraine, was particularly long, hot and hard. I remember looking up to the green, tiered campsite high above me with dismay. I cursed Dave for getting there first and choosing one of the larger tents on the highest tier, then, after laboriously plodding upwards and collapsing exhausted outside the chosen tent, I cursed Tia, an annoyingly hyper-active thirty-year-old from Scotland, for running around the campsite shouting, "Hey, I'm flying!"

From there, we had two shorter and thankfully cooler days on the Baltoro Glacier until we got to Concordia. Dubbed the "Thrown Room of the Gods", Concordia sits at a junction of glaciers surrounded by some of the world's highest and most magnificent peaks. It was to be one of the highlights of the trek and would provide, so the guide-books informed us, one of the best views of K2. There was an inevitability, however, in the deterioration of the weather as we approached the campsite; day upon day of wall-to-wall, searing sunshine was replaced by the greyness of a North Wales bank-holiday weekend. Our spirits sagged – the forecast was for three days of rain – all we could see in the direction of K2 was a huge bank of grey cloud. We all spent the following day resting, reading, gazing longingly up the glacier hoping for a chink in the armour of cloud and listening to the sound of per-



The Triangular and Snow Streaked Summit of K2

sistent rain on canvas. Umbrellas bought for use as sunshades were used more conventionally as we scurried over the glacial rubble to the mess tent for meals. Spirits were low; Concordia might be one of the world's most celebrated viewpoints but we could have been camped on a spoil heap in Blaenau Ffestiniog for all we could see.

As more of the same was forecast for the following day, the round trip to K2 Base Camp was abandoned. We all gathered in the Mess tent for a lingering, gloomy breakfast, then someone noticed that the bank of cloud obscuring K2 was lightening. A chink appeared and we briefly saw the summit, triangular and snow streaked. A buzz of excitement rippled around the group and we all gathered to gaze expectantly towards the mountain. The sun began to shine and the porters began to sing, the rhythm of their clapping lifting spirits as the clouds teased us, lifting here, covering there, drifting in and out while we all waited expectantly. Dancing porters, hands and fingers elegantly stretching and curling while others banged out simple rhythms on a cut-down plastic container, performed with an energy which belied the altitude and the huge physical effort it had taken to get here.

Throughout the day, the cloud came and went, never clearing completely, but dressing K2's pyramidal bulk with a collar of white or hiding its summit tantalisingly. We were, however,

able to see the incredible beauty of the mountain. Huge, triangular, streaked with snow, its grandeur dominated all around it and I felt intensely privileged to have experienced its slow unveiling.

But K2 is just a part of the beauty of Concordia. Whilst it could be described as the most spectacularly placed open sewer in the world (with no formal toilet area at the campsite and lots of visitors suffering from "trekkers' trots", things were not particularly hygienic), if you keep your eyes raised from the glacier, you cannot fail to be impressed by the wonderful mountain scenery surrounding and towering above you. Clockwise from K2, the bulk of Broad Peak with its twin peaks breaking the magic 8000 metre barrier stands side by side with the chisel-topped, steep sided pyramid of Gasherbrum IV. That day a cushion of wind-sculptured cloud hung above GIV's lopped top. Then come the sharp, spiky satellite peaks of Gasherbrum V and VI, dwarfed by their neighbours. Chogalisa, further up the valley is next, alpine in stature and Liskamm-like, its slopes completely snow covered. Then, much closer, the huge spike and serrated ridge of Mitre Peak that dominates Concordia's southern side. Moving back around towards K2, sparkling Marble Peak provides a fitting foreground to the world's second highest mountain, and so concludes a 360 degree panorama, which rarely drops below 600m. Awe-inspiring.



Porter Dancing at Concordia

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Later that night, the cloud eventually left K2 naked in the moonlight and the next morning we saw it, clear and sunlit for the first time. It is hard to describe how wonderful it looked and how emotional I felt as I left Concordia to climb to Gasherbrum Base Camp with Dave. Imagine seeing Snowdon at sunrise, or the Cuillins as the cloud lifts above them. Multiply the grandeur and the emotion ten-fold and perhaps you'll understand...

That, apart from a glimpse of its summit peaking through the granite towers of Trango on our walk out, was the last time I saw K2. Whilst I was enjoying my time with Dave and sampling the unique atmosphere of a high mountain Base Camp with a dozen or more teams from all over the world spread out along a thin stretch of moraine, some of the trekking party did the long 12 hour round trip to K2 Base Camp. After an emotional farewell to Dave, I rejoined them at Concordia; by that time cloud had enveloped K2 once more and the next morning we awoke to the muffled sound of snow falling on the tent.

And so it just remained to retrace our steps along the Baltoro glacier (our intended way out across the Gondogoro La was closed due to a large crevasse) all the way back to Askole where we heard about the upheaval developing in Islamabad. We listened in dismay as we heard about curfews and sieges and hoped against hope that things would settle down before we arrived there in a few days' time.

An increased police and army presence when we arrived back in Skardu



Goro II Campsite (4380 m)

showed the seriousness of the events in the capitol. Our route back to Islamabad was closed due to landslides and there were rumours of fighting further along the Karakoram Highway. Our dream trip was threatening to turn into a nightmare. Our agents eventually managed to secure tickets for us on the constantly overbooked flight from Skardu and I arrived, with some trepidation, in Islamabad with a day to spare before my international flight home.

The siege ended the morning I heard the explosions. It ended with much bloodshed and loss of life. All reports in the local papers failed to mention what happened to the children in the religious school, but claimed that

the perpetrators had been killed or arrested. Since I've been home, reports on the international news have shown scenes of unrest around the Red Mosque area and political turmoil constantly threatens to engulf the country. It makes me very sad to think that the friendly, welcoming and intensely proud people we met on our travels could soon be living in a country devastated by conflict.

But, explosions and sieges apart, the picture of Pakistan I will always remember is the wonderful sight of K2 peaking through the cloud as the porters danced in celebration. Let's hope the country remains stable enough for many more visitors to experience the joy of such scenes.



Panorama of K2 (8611 m) & Broad Peak (8047 m)